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HB 1900 DEBATE - THIRD READING

(by Goldman, Metcalf, Bonnen, Raymond, Button, et al.)

HB 1900, A bill to be entitled An Act relating to municipalities that adopt budgets that defund municipal police departments.

REPRESENTATIVE GOLDMAN: This is the pro-police, back-the-blue bill, and I believe there are a couple of amendments.

[Amendment No. 1 by Wu was laid before the house.]

REPRESENTATIVE WU: Members, it has been a very long 24 hours, so I appreciate your attention. And just as a reminder of what we're talking about, this is about a bill that helps protect all of our citizens—all of our citizens—by making sure that the police are properly funded. This is a good idea. We want to do this but we want to make sure that we don't discriminate against each other. We make sure that we don't want to discriminate against different parts of our state and different cities based on where we live. We want all people to be protected, and we want to make sure that when we're making policy like this, that it is not arbitrary and capricious.

And so my first amendment would completely remove the population cap so we're not discriminating against rural areas, so we're not discriminating against small cities. They are as equally deserving of protection in this bill as anyone else—as anyone else. We are all Texans equally deserving of protection, and here's what I'm talking about. I have right here a list of current populations of the State of Texas with each city ranked in order. And yesterday—I'm not sure if you remember—Mr. Goldman said that it is the major metro areas that he is concerned about because anecdotally that's where he's heard that there were problems. So in my area, I live in the city of Houston, which is a major metro area. But what I think maybe people who don't live in that area understand is that the city of Houston is just one small part of a larger, major metro area, and that major metro area includes many smaller cities that are below the threshold. In fact, many are well below the threshold. So let me just tell you some of the cities, independent municipalities with their own police force and with their own law enforcement, that are well under the 250,000 threshold: the city of Webster, the city of Bellaire—which I live right door next to—West U, Southside Place, Hedwig Village, Bunker Hill Village, Jersey Village, South Houston, Galena Park, Jacinto City, Humble, Cypress, Deer Park. Many of these cities are

inside—inside—the city of Houston itself. Why should they not be protected? I mean, just in case the City of Houston decides to defund their police—what if they did? These cities would be left unprotected.

So what this amendment does is puts this requirement and gets rid of the capricious nature of this bill and makes this apply to all cities, especially in the major metro areas, especially if they're smaller cities within the major metro area. Because if that's where we're concerned about, that's where we should target this.

GOLDMAN: As we said yesterday, anecdotally this is happening in major metropolitan cities across the nation, not smaller communities. So I am going to oppose the amendment.

REPRESENTATIVE J.D. JOHNSON: Representative Goldman, you said you wanted to make sure that this was bracketed just for the major metropolitan cities because of some anecdotal information that you found said that there was—

GOLDMAN: Well, it's not anecdotal. It's fact.

J.D. JOHNSON: It's fact?

GOLDMAN: Yes, sir.

J.D. JOHNSON: Is there crime in every city in the State of Texas?

GOLDMAN: I'm not advised of every single city in the State of Texas, Mr. Johnson.

J.D. JOHNSON: Then why are you only advised on the 11 cities that this is bracketed to but you're not advised on the other 489 cities that it is not bracketed to?

GOLDMAN: I'm pretty certain that this is best for the major cities in our state, Mr. Johnson.

J.D. JOHNSON: So does every city in this state have a police force?

GOLDMAN: I'm not advised of that. I don't know if every single city has a police force.

J.D. JOHNSON: What are police for?

GOLDMAN: Police are to help with public safety, provide public safety for our citizens.

J.D. JOHNSON: And there are many cities. Are there cities in this state that have police forces beyond the 11 that you bracketed for?

GOLDMAN: Are there cities in this state who have police? Yes, there are cities in this state who have police forces.

J.D. JOHNSON: So why didn't we bracket—because if police are supposed to be for public safety—then why don't we make sure that every city in this state has an opportunity to protect every citizen?

GOLDMAN: Well, frankly, it's not a problem. For some of our smaller cities, it's not a problem at all.

J.D. JOHNSON: I'm sorry?

GOLDMAN: It's not a problem for some of the smaller cities. They're not defunding and they're not diverting funds away from. There's no stories out there where some of our smaller cities, not only in this state but in the entire nation, where they're diverting money or taking money away from police departments and threatening public safety in their cities.

J.D. JOHNSON: I'm sorry. I thought we were going to get away from that hateful rhetoric of calling it "defunding" when it's simply reallocating resources from one department to another.

GOLDMAN: Diverting funds. If that's what you want to me use, I'll say diverting funds.

J.D. JOHNSON: That's not defunding. What we're trying to do is to make sure we protect citizens.

GOLDMAN: Absolutely, we are.

J.D. JOHNSON: And so if we're protecting citizens—so a small town has the right and the opportunity to move what they see fit for themselves?

GOLDMAN: Again, Mr. Johnson, we don't see it as a problem, not only in this state but anywhere in the nation, where a smaller community is taking funds away from public safety, because many of those smaller communities know that public safety is their number one priority, to provide enough police to make their communities as safe as possible.

J.D. JOHNSON: The smaller towns must be a lot smarter than the larger, more populated metropolitan areas. Is what you're saying?

GOLDMAN: Those are your words. They're not mine, Mr. Johnson.

J.D. JOHNSON: I'm asking. That's a question. That's literally a question. Because you're saying that they're smart enough not to do it, but you're saying Austin, Dallas, and San Antonio are not smart enough?

GOLDMAN: No. I'm saying that some of their budgets aren't as comprehensive. Some of their budgets aren't as comprehensive, and when some of them aren't—

J.D. JOHNSON: Some of them aren't what?

GOLDMAN: Some of their budgets are not as large, as comprehensive. And so again, we have seen where major metropolitan cities, not only in this state but in this nation, have taken funds away from their police departments, diverted funds from their police departments, and given it to other areas that are not about public safety. And we are trying to make sure that our major metropolitan areas in this state, our cities, do not divert funds from the police to provide public safety for the citizens. Because again, as elected officials in this state, we want to make certain that the 29 to 30 million people in this state feel safe.

J.D. JOHNSON: But you're not bracketing this bill for 30 million residents of this state. You're bracketing this bill for 11 cities, not all 30 million. You're literally only talking about 11 cities. And yet you keep saying all Texans, but you're only looking at certain Texans. So please stop with saying all and then

you're saying only a few. And then when there's a sensible amendment that says, look, let's just do this for everyone, I'm not quite sure why you want to penalize one city over another—

GOLDMAN: Oh, I'm not penalizing anybody.

J.D. JOHNSON: —because you feel like you just want to do it.

GOLDMAN: We're not penalizing anybody. Mr. Johnson, we are not penalizing anybody. This bill does not penalize one city. The bill does not penalize one city.

J.D. JOHNSON: It penalizes 11, potentially.

GOLDMAN: No, it doesn't. That's—it does not penalize one city.

J.D. JOHNSON: Your bill is bracketed to how many? Your bill is bracketed for cities over what?

GOLDMAN: It's about 10 cities over 200,000.

J.D. JOHNSON: And does the bill offer a penalty if cities over 250,000 choose to remove a janitor and put it in another department?

GOLDMAN: They can remove a janitor.

J.D. JOHNSON: Does your bill—

GOLDMAN: No, they can remove a janitor. They can remove a janitor.

J.D. JOHNSON: And the money that goes with it?

GOLDMAN: As long as they keep their police budget current or increase it, there's no problem with that. They can do whatever they want with different divisions.

J.D. JOHNSON: And when they choose to—when the Super Bowl or some special big event comes and they have to increase their budget for overtime purposes, they can never reduce their budget?

GOLDMAN: They are allowed to do so.

J.D. JOHNSON: And if they have analytical data that says crime is going down, do those police departments themselves, can they make their decisions?

GOLDMAN: Mr. Johnson, you just said the purpose of this bill. If crime is going down, then their police force is doing their job. Then their current funding is appropriate. So to that point, they probably don't need to increase their budget for that. They can put the money elsewhere if they have extra income.

J.D. JOHNSON: They can put it elsewhere in the city?

GOLDMAN: If the crime's going down, then there's no reason to defund the police at all. The current budget is exactly the number it needs to be to provide public safety in that community.

J.D. JOHNSON: I mean, it's really hilarious how you keep saying defunding, and we just said we're not going to say defunding because we know what that rhetoric means. We're not trying to defund police. You're pitting—you're making everybody in this body feel intimidated because they don't want to go back—

GOLDMAN: I'm not making anybody feel intimidated.

J.D. JOHNSON: —because they're afraid of someone saying that they have defunded police.

GOLDMAN: Everybody has a right—

J.D. JOHNSON: No one is defunding police.

GOLDMAN: Mr. Johnson, I am not trying to intimidate one member of this body. I'm absolutely encouraging members to vote their districts.

J.D. JOHNSON: Vote their districts but their districts are not impacted by this bill.

GOLDMAN: Then vote no.

J.D. JOHNSON: Then accept the amendment to protect 30 million Texans—30 million Texans. And there's no data to prove that crime is on the rise in only those 11 cities when there is crime in the entire State of Texas. This is a very discriminatory bill that is only attacking certain cities. We need to put the amendment on to protect all Texans because what you're saying right now is that we, from this body, don't care about all. We only care about penalizing large cities.

GOLDMAN: Mr. Johnson, Mr. Wu has an amendment. I'm going to leave it to the will of the body on the vote on the amendment.

J.D. JOHNSON: But you just said—

GOLDMAN: So it's a will of the body—

J.D. JOHNSON: You're going to leave it to the will?

GOLDMAN: If it's the will of the body to put the amendment on there, we will do so.

J.D. JOHNSON: But not support from you?

GOLDMAN: I personally am going to vote no.

J.D. JOHNSON: You asked the gentleman to bring the amendment up yesterday, and now you're going to—

WU: I really enjoyed this lively debate. It is fantastic that we can discuss why we are putting this particular bracket on this bill and why we are choosing or not choosing to put this amendment on and to remove the bracket completely. Representative Goldman specifically said that this bill was for everyone in the State of Texas, all 30 million people. But unfortunately, his bill right now is not for all 30 million people. That might seem a little bit capricious, maybe a little bit arbitrary, in the way we're doing it. And I'm trying to fix this with this amendment. If we're true to our word, if we're true to our word of what we're saying why we are doing this to carry out our legislative intent, then we should accept this amendment to make it cover all 30 million Texans and not just some.

In addition, Mr. Goldman said again, repeatedly—yesterday, today, the last time we had this on the floor—that this was about covering the major metro areas. And for those of y'all from smaller towns, smaller cities, you may not know this, but the major metro areas include many cities. And I just read you a list, and I'm happy to read you that list one more time. In just Houston alone, we have Webster, the city of Bellaire, West U, Southside Place city, Hedwig Village city, Bunker Hill city, Jersey Village city, South Houston city, Galena Park city, the city of Jacinto City, Humble, Cypress, and Deer Park. All of these are separate municipalities inside Harris County in the major metro area. Some of them are within the city of Houston itself. It would be very arbitrary to cut them out when we're talking about major metro areas.

[Amendment No. 1 failed of adoption by Record No. 844.]

[Amendment No. 2 by Wu was laid before the house.]

WU: I understand that that last amendment maybe had too much for some people, and you didn't agree with that policy. So let me change it a little bit. I dedicate this amendment to my good friend Jonathan Stickland. And this is because the city of Bedford is right at the 50,000 cut. And the city of Bedford is right between two of the cities that are listed in this bill, that are bracketed in this bill—Dallas and Fort Worth. And if we're concerned about Dallas and Fort Worth, then we should be concerned about a city smack dab right in the middle of them, squeezed between all of the rioting and all the protests and all the stuff. If we're concerned about all that, then we should make sure that Bedford is protected as well.

REPRESENTATIVE CANALES: This puts former State Representative Jonathan Stickland in the bill?

WU: It does.

CANALES: Awesome.

REPRESENTATIVE P. KING: Mr. Wu, I just wanted to correct you just a little bit. You mentioned Mr. Stickland lives in Bedford? He has moved into my district and my county.

WU: I'm very sorry about that.

P. KING: So I just wanted you to be able to get the record straight.

WU: Which city is that?

P. KING: Actually it's in Willow Park—Willow Park, actually.

WU: I think in this amendment that would be covered as well.

P. KING: But Willow Park doesn't want anything to do with this, of course. I just wanted to make sure you knew the logistics.

WU: So in case—I believe you, Representative King. And just to make sure we understand, there are many other cities that this amendment would cover including the city of Georgetown—which abuts, which comes right up to the city of Austin—which would be included. The city of Pasadena which comes right up to the city of Houston—this amendment would now include it. And we want to

make sure these places—if completely removing the cap was too much, this is a more balanced approach where it would cover a lot of the cities that come right up to major metro areas.

[Amendment No. 2 failed of adoption by Record No. 845.]

[Amendment No. 3 by Wu was laid before the house.]

WU: I promise this is the last one. This, in fact, is an amendment dedicated specifically to my good friend Richard Raymond. Yesterday on the mic when we discussed this bill, Mr. Raymond discussed how he had one city—only one city—that was included within this bill. The city is the wonderful, the beautiful, city of Laredo. Because currently we think the city is around 259,000 people, but that was a 2019 number. And in fact, unfortunately for Mr. Raymond, his cities have had a little shrinkage. And in 2017-2018, that number actually went from 261,000 to 259,000. And now by the time this bill is enacted—by the time this bill is enacted—his city will probably be below the 250,000 threshold which he himself said that he supported and loved because it included his city in it.

Now, I want to make sure that my good friend Richard Raymond is protected. I want to make sure he is protected and that we are true to our word because I want to cut this cap down to 200,000 to make sure that his city is included because Laredo will be below the 250,000 threshold by the time this bill is enacted. And if we are true to our word, let's make sure that we do that.

J.D. JOHNSON: Representative Wu, you just said your good friend Representative Raymond wanted to make sure that his city was in?

WU: Yes. He said—I believe yesterday he said he enjoyed—that he appreciated that the bill included his city. And we just want to make sure that it stays included.

J.D. JOHNSON: Representative Wu, would you accept a friendly amendment that would allow cities to opt in to this bill? So that way, if people like Representative Raymond want to do it, there may be others.

WU: I think that would be a separate amendment to this amendment.

J.D. JOHNSON: There may be other representatives that want to make sure that their residents are protected. Just as Representative Goldman has pointed out, this is for all, so why don't we open it up to make sure that we can opt in?

WU: I think that's a great amendment that I think is probably better separately.

REPRESENTATIVE RAYMOND: I want to thank my dear friend Gene Wu for being so considerate of me. And please, if you want to make an amendment to the amendment, spell it L-a-r-e-d-o, represented by Raymond, and put it on there. I'm all for it. Let's go. You think I was messing with you? Put Laredo in. Put it in. They didn't do it on second reading. I wish you had, Gene, because it's harder to get it on third reading. But, you know, calling me out like that? Really, Gene? Bring it, baby. Put it on. I'm all for it. Vote aye.

[Amendment No. 3 failed of adoption by Record No. 846.]

[Representative J.D. Johnson raised a point of order against further consideration of **HB 1900** under Rule 8, Section 1(a)(1), of the House Rules on the grounds that the bill caption fails to give reasonable notice of the subject of the bill. The point of order was withdrawn.]

J.D. JOHNSON: Members, we're going to do this one more time, and then I'm going to sit down and be quiet, and you probably won't hear from me again for the next two years. But when I'm passionate about something, I'm passionate about something. When I think things are fair, I think things are fair. When I think things are unfair, I realize things are unfair and I call them for what they are. I hope that you guys can realize that. This is a public safety bill that says we are backing the blue. This bill is bracketed for 11 cities in this state. There were multiple, multiple, multiple amendments to offer to make sure that we could take care of all 30 million—all 30 million—residents of this great state. The author simply said no.

He only wants to deal with those 11 cities because he thinks there is crime. But when I look at some of these cities on violent crimes per capita, I see that Snyder, Gonzales, Beaumont, Odessa, Levelland, Paris, Lubbock all have higher rates of violent crime per 1,000 residents than the other 11 cities combined. So if this was serious about public safety, then why are we not protecting all residents of the great State of Texas? I then asked for a simple amendment that said let cities opt in if cities want to opt in, and the author said no.

So my real question is, is this really about public safety or is this about political propaganda? That's what this is all about. Is this truly about protecting the citizens of the great State of Texas or is this truly about just giving it to democratic cities across this state? When you don't even want to talk about protecting the 23 million other residents and you won't even let them opt in to be protected? You won't let police make their own decision. You're right, I ain't really talking to y'all no more. Now I'm just talking to the camera because y'all ain't going to listen. Y'all are going to keep going on doing what you're going to do. At the end of the day, this is what it's all about. Make sure you vote your conscience. Make sure you understand. You're not even affected by this bill. None of your cities are even affected by this bill but 11 cities in this state will be. You don't care because all you care about is your red and the blue, and yeah, I'm sick of it right now. And it's unfortunate because the author just simply said he did it because he felt like it. He did it because he felt like it. I wanted to go into cities and penalize them because he felt like it. The same way we put up hateful, harmful bills all the time because we felt like it and we pick and choose who we're going to criminalize and who we're going to penalize.

Is that democratic? Is that American? You pick and choose who you want to affect? You pick and choose? You choose not to legislate for all Texans, but you're going to legislate for those that don't even affect you. This is not Texas. This is not a democracy. This is harming Texas. Every time we do something like this, it is harming Texas. The United States is looking, and they're realizing what this is. And sure, you're going to hide behind, "Oh, I had to go party line." Because I talked to many of you yesterday, and all of you said, "I understood it, brother. I understood it and I appreciate where you came from, but—but." It's not

leadership. It's not leadership, but it's easy to sit in here and legislate when it doesn't affect you, when we've got to go back home and deal with our residents. It's easy when you don't have to deal with them.

I know you don't understand when you have to talk to a crying mother whose child was just shot by the police. I know you don't have to deal with that. I know you don't want to hear us talk about what's going on in these major metropolitan cities with some of these police departments. I know you don't want to talk about that because it doesn't affect you. And since it doesn't affect you, we're just going to ram it down your throat. I'm embarrassed. I'm embarrassed for this body. I'm embarrassed for this state that we can come up here and pass hateful, harmful legislation. And we shrug it like it ain't no big deal because you get to go back to your districts and say, "I did good work," when you know you didn't.

WU: Members, I appreciate your patience. I know it's been a long few days. I'm really asking you to not vote for this bill anymore because I'm afraid that we have created a piece of legislation that is very arbitrary and very capricious in nature and which just generally violates the spirit of our State Constitution and the United States Constitution as well. And here's the reason why. Some of the things that we look to when we decide if something is arbitrary and capricious is whether there is a rational basis of what we're doing to the way we're trying to do it. So if we're saying that we're trying to reduce crime, we're trying to protect people, we're trying to make sure that all 30 million Texans are protected, then we should have legislation that reflects that. If the legislation does not actually protect all 30 million people, does not actually do what it says it's supposed to do, then there is no connection.

There must be a rational relationship between the policy goals and the policy itself. And as the federal guidelines often say, there has to be an underlying rationale or a factual assertion that must be reasonable. Earlier, you heard us talk about the idea that, as Mr. Goldman repeatedly said, this is about the major metros. This is about the major cities. But we showed him—we demonstrated to him that the major cities, the major metro areas, included more than just one city. In the greater Houston area, there are more than a dozen cities, many of them actually completely inside the city of Houston itself. Those were left out. They're not being protected, and those would be the pockets where citizens do not receive adequate protection. And that is unfair. That is not rational.

Additionally, you heard Representative Johnson in his closing remarks say that, in fact, if we're trying to reduce crime, if we're trying to protect citizens from violent crimes, it is, in fact, actually, those smaller municipalities where there is the greatest dangers to those citizens. It is, in fact, the cities that we have left out that have a disproportionately higher rate of violent crime. But yet we leave them out. We left them alone. We didn't protect them, and that is not reasonable. And that is not rational. Additionally, you heard earlier that we wanted to protect Representative Raymond's area. In fact, he came to the mic and demanded that we make sure that his area was protected going forward. And we denied him that. We denied him that protection. That is not rational. That is not reasonable. And members, I'm going to have to ask you to vote no on this bill. It

doesn't protect all Texans. It discriminates against the Texans who actually need this protection the most. It does the opposite. It does the opposite of what the stated purpose of the bill is, and that is unreasonable.

GOLDMAN: Members, let's support public safety in this state. Let's support our police. Let's back the blue.

[HB 1900 was passed by Record No. 847.]

SB 7 DEBATE - THIRD READING

(Cain, Schofield, Jetton, Klick, and Oliverson - House Sponsors)

SB 7, A bill to be entitled An Act relating to election integrity and security, including by preventing fraud in the conduct of elections in this state; increasing criminal penalties; creating criminal offenses.

REPRESENTATIVE CAIN: Members, with that, I close. I move passage of **SB 7**.

REPRESENTATIVE ANCHIA: Successful. Safe. Secure. Successful, safe, secure—these are the terms that were used by Governor Abbott's secretary of state, the chief elections officer of Texas, when describing the 2020 election. Yet this bill, **SB 7**, rode into the Texas house cloaked in that long-standing pretext of purity of the ballot box. And that pretext has denied full participation of African Americans and Latinos in Texas for generations, Ms. Thompson, as you well know. In the recitals, if you look at page 1 of **SB 7**, the recitals scream out. And they say, "reforms are needed to the election laws of this state to ensure that fraud does not undermine the public confidence in the electoral process," members. And you can find that on the first page in the recitals.

Well, members, that's a big lie. The rare instances of fraud in Texas—that fraud that's less likely to occur than any of us being hit by lightning—they don't undermine confidence in our elections. Not at all, in fact. You know what undermines confidence in our elections? It is the lies that are told in the face of all contrary evidence by politicians for their own and their party's political gain, the lie that an election for the presidency was stolen by people of color in America, the big lie. And when a president and his enablers tell lies—lies that are so brazen, in fact, that one of the president's top lawyers admitted in court that "no reasonable person would conclude that the statements were truly statements of facts"—that was just politics, members. That was just politics. You really can't believe it because we were just talking politically.

And when tested, over 60 courts across America threw out the big lie on its ear, including the United States Supreme Court that has three appointees of the ex-president on it. And in one notable case in Pennsylvania—and members, at least some members on this floor, are well aware of the cases in Pennsylvania—the judge found "strained legal arguments without merit and speculative accusations" that were not supported by any evidence. And when the lies are so big, so brazen, and so dangerous to our democracy, guess what happens? Police are killed. Police that were locking arms to protect the U.S. Capitol when it was overrun. Lies so big and dangerous that the former vice president of the United States would have been hung by a mob during the

insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. Lies that were so dangerous that republican and democratic members alike—members of Congress, including the speaker of the house—were called to be killed. Lies so dangerous that when we showed up on the first day, instead of a joyous time celebrating people's elections and a new legislative session where we serve the people of Texas, we were met by security briefings and credible threats against our lives. It's not democrats—republicans and democrats and Texans.

And this bill, members, this perpetuates the big lie, and it offers the same pretext in its recitals that resulted in findings of intentional discrimination against voters of color by this Texas Legislature. And this isn't some old timey, black and white news reel. That was last decade alone. And that's not me saying it. I know, you guys tell me all the time, you hate when I talk about that. These are not my words. These are the words of bipartisan federal judges in three federal courts, including a federal court in San Antonio that found unanimously, with two republican appointees and one democratic appointee, intentional discrimination by this legislature on voting rights matters. That is damning. Yet we stand here today in a state where soon you can carry a gun without a permit but you must swear an oath under penalty of perjury to help your madrina or your padrino simply cast their constitutional vote. And members, that—that's just wrong. But that's where we are in this state.

Members, we must rise. We must rise in the spirit of the late congressman and civil rights hero John Lewis to make good trouble on this bill. We must rise as the defenders of the vote. And we will rise. And I ask you to rise with me against the big lie that **SB 7** perpetuates. So join me in voting no. Join me in voting to protect the votes of republicans in Texas. Join me in protecting the vote of democrats in Texas. Or just join me in protecting the rights and the votes of Texans.

REPRESENTATIVE ROSENTHAL: Thanks to my colleagues for standing with me today. Members, I'm here to voice my opposition to this bill that so many consider to be an instrument for voter suppression and voter intimidation all under the guise of "election integrity." I submit to you that in a representative democracy, we advance competing ideas and we ask the voters to decide what they want. Forwarding this notion means we should be working to increase ballot access, and we should be working to increase voter engagement and participation. Current leadership has been in charge of election policy in this state for over 20 years. Have y'all really been unable to secure our elections after all this time?

Your own secretary of state said the 2020 election was free, fair, safe, and secure. Your attorney general pulled out all the stops to chase after phantom voter fraud in the 2020 election. He assigned extra people. He used 22,000 staff hours, spent a quarter of a million dollars, and all of that to identify 16—one, six—16 problem ballots. So you know I'm a numbers guy. There were 11 million—more than 11 million votes cast in this state in 2020—and the attorney general found 16 problem ballots, most of them innocent mistakes. So 22,000 staff hours, a quarter of a million dollars, all for 16 ballots out of 11 million. That is, if you do the math, 0.00014 percent—roughly one in 700,000 votes. One in 700,000, y'all. That's roughly the same as your chances of

being struck by a meteorite. Anyone in here even heard of somebody being struck by a meteorite? You are much more likely to be struck by lightning than to find an instance of voter fraud in this state. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, you are more than 15 times as likely to drop dead dancing at a dance party than you are to find a case of voter fraud in Texas.

No, members, after decades of current leadership control of the executive and legislative branches, Texas is already rated as the most difficult state to register and cast a vote in. We ranked worst in the nation, 50 out of 50, according to a study from Northern Illinois University and Jacksonville University as reported in December 2020. The reasons that they give for our bottom-level ranking include things like our extension of the 30-day deadline for in-person voter registration, restrictions on absentee and mail-in voting, and reduced numbers of polling locations in some parts of our state. The states who are ranked at the top of this list, the states where it's easiest to vote, they have things—nice things—like online voter registration, like automatic voter registration, and same-day registration on Election Day. Some states have universal mail-in voting. This is considered by political scientists to be the hallmark of improved voter access. In Texas, voting by mail already has serious restrictions, and this bill seeks to further limit voting by mail, instead of developing more robust systems in our state to improve both access and security of vote-by-mail, the way that they've done in states like Utah and Colorado who have universal vote-by-mail.

Members, I'm going to tell you this is not about policy because if it was about policy, we would surely be talking about ways to improve voter access like expanding drive-thru voting and ways to better secure and proliferate vote-by-mail systems the way that other states do to encourage voter participation. This bill purports to be about election security. I just want to know how in the world it makes our elections more secure to reduce allowable voting hours on certain days; to dictate the allocated numbers of voting machines in certain locations, in any location; to criminalize sending out vote-by-mail applications—just sending out the application, not the ballot, an application to vote by mail. How does it make our elections more secure to end drive-thru voting? How does it make our elections more secure to disallow staff from your elections officers from being in polling places to address issues as they arise? The short answer is none of these measures make voting more secure. There's no election integrity problem in Texas. Remember, you're more likely to get struck by lightning—far more likely to get struck by lightning—than you are to find any case of serious voter fraud in Texas.

So this bill is not about election security. It's about suppressing the vote. It's about intimidating voters and election workers. Why else would we allow armed, partisan poll watchers access to the ballot place that we don't even allow our election officers, while we criminalize simple human errors made by voter election employees? It boggles my mind, y'all. Who in the whole wide world could see these measures as anything other than voter intimidation? We've already seen video of conservative advocacy groups planing to build an "army" of militarized, partisan poll watchers they intend to send into urban areas,

"problem areas," areas that are predominantly ethnic with black and brown populations. We all know these populations tend to vote democrat more often in elections.

The people of Texas—y'all, the people of Texas want us here working on broadly popular, very important issues. Things like, I don't know, access to health care, improving public education, maybe finally securing our electrical power infrastructure, and restoring our powerhouse Texas economy. Instead, you're here debating anti-trans bills, heartbeat bills, reducing commercial liability for transportation and trucking—y'all want to fight to the death to protect your interpretation of the Second Amendment but apparently don't care so much about the First Amendment—and attacking local control of larger municipalities like where I'm from, Houston, Harris County. I submit that if focus were on forwarding truly popular policy, then you would want more voter participation, not less. This bill is bad for Texas because it's a bold effort to silence the voices of certain voters, and with that, I urge you to vote no.

REPRESENTATIVE REYNOLDS: Members, when this debate on **SB 7** started, I was reminded of the words of former President John F. Kennedy when he said, "Let us not seek the republican answer or the democratic answer, but the right answer. Let us not seek to fix the blame for the past. Let us accept our own responsibility for the future." And closer, more personal to me, my faith teaches me in Proverbs 31:8-9 to: "Speak out for the one who cannot speak, for the rights of those who are doomed. Speak out, judge fairly, and defend the rights of oppressed and needy people." What we're doing with this bill is disenfranchising people of color, the poor, the elderly, students, the young, and the disabled.

You know, this bill was personal to me and so many of my black and brown colleagues. As I stand here today as the first African American elected state representative in Fort Bend County since Reconstruction, I realize I didn't get here by myself. I stand on the shoulders of those who came before me, those who paved the way. And Chairman Anchia mentioned our late, great Congressman John Lewis, who coined the phrase "good trouble." He made good and necessary trouble, which ultimately led to our own Texan former President Lyndon Baines Johnson signing the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which made it possible for people of color to hold public office. Because before that, you had many barriers, even after the enactment of the Fifteenth Amendment, called Jim Crow laws. And you know what those were designed to do? Those laws were designed to stop people who look like me from voting. They didn't write that, but what they had enacted were poll taxes. You had to pay to vote. They enacted literacy tests where you had to recite the Constitution. They enacted senseless things, like guessing how many bubbles were in a bar of soap, before you could vote.

Now, I know if you're an American, you believe that voting is one of the most precious and fundamental rights that we have. We send our troops abroad to go to war to protect that fundamental, precious right to vote. It is the bedrock of our democracy, and here we are in 2021, trying to turn back the clock. We thought we had arrived past those times, and here we are doing the right thing. What we're doing here today does not make Texas a better place. It does not embrace the diversity of our state—one of the most diverse states in this entire

United States of America. It does not encourage new businesses to come to Texas. And for all of my fiscal, conservative hawks, The Perryman Group has estimated that we're going to lose billions—with a "b"—billions of dollars to our economy and hundreds of thousands of jobs if we enact this legislation. It does not encourage more participation in our democratic process. It does just the opposite. And Representative Rosenthal is right. Instead of focusing on this, why aren't we focusing on making voting more accessible? We haven't even had hearings on online voter registration. I served on the Elections Committee for two terms some years ago. This is a great, bipartisan concept, and we can't even get a freaking hearing on it. But we get a hearing and debate this?

As Chairman Cain stood at the front mic and laid out **SB 7**, I could not help to think about what happened in this very chamber 118 years ago. In 1903, a state representative named Alexander Watkins Terrell led the charge to pass what became known as the Terrell Election Laws. The first iteration of these laws included the poll tax, which resulted in the disenfranchisement of many poor Texans, African American Texans, and Hispanic Texans. In 1905, he made certain his law was amended in such a way that it allowed the political parties to exclude black Texans from the primaries. This was eventually codified in statute. And as Chairman Cain laid out this treacherous bill at the front mic, I find it ironic that almost directly to his right, on that wall right there as you go toward the chief clerk's office, hangs a portrait of none other than Alexander Watkins Terrell. And here we are. This house will pass a bill just as destructive to the democratic process and just as disenfranchising as the poll tax and white primary law which Alexander Watkins Terrell oversaw and championed. I urge you all to walk over there and take a look at his portrait over there as we recall that day 118 years later. We still know the name of that man who took away from blacks and browns and the poor the precious and fundamental right to vote. And here we are at this body where we say we're not like Congress in D.C, where we're statesmen and we work across the aisle and bipartisan, but this is nothing but a partisan bill. Sometimes you have to rise above that. Dr. King said this best, that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." And I'm trying to appeal to the social consciousness of you all.

Now, all of us in this chamber should consider whether or not we want to be remembered in that fashion. I submit to you that when the history books are written that you want to be on the right side of history. You want to be on the right side of voting rights. You want to be on the right side of equality. You want to be on the right side of equal rights. You want to be on the right side of freedom and liberty. You don't want to be unpatriotic. And I urge you all to vote your conscience and to vote no on this Jim Crow 2.0 voter disenfranchising bill that does nothing to move Texas forward.

REPRESENTATIVE BUCY: Members out there, you've heard from our colleagues, and they've hit a few points that we need to hit again because I don't know if everyone is listening. This is what the Elections Committee was told, not by democrats, by the secretary of state's office. They said it twice—success, smooth, and secure. Members, we've heard a lot about election integrity and

so-called voter fraud since November 3, 2020, and we've heard a lot about those topics as we have debated **SB 7**. But it's important that we remember what we know to be true.

At the start of the legislative session—let's say it again. I hope our colleagues are listening. And if you're not, I know the people of Texas are listening. Because the secretary of state's office came into this building, into the Elections Committee, and they told us when we asked how did the 2020 elections go, their words: It was a success. It was smooth. And it was secure. Subsequently, in that same meeting, we received information from the attorney general's office, and then we had to press to get the real data. And what we've found is that in the past five years—in the past five years—16 defendants have been convicted of an election-related offense. Rosenthal shared numbers with you. If you add in the deferred adjudications and deferred diversion programs, out of the 16.9 million registered voters, if you do the math over the last five years of elections, that is 0.00000436 percent—a fraction of a fraction of a fraction of a fraction of a fraction of a percent. And with over 40 million votes cast, that number goes up. That's just one time.

What are we doing here today? Here's the simple truth. **SB 7** will not keep our elections secure or maintain accurate voter rolls. They're already safe and secure, as we were told. What we need to do is prioritize how we modernize and move forward. That should be our focus of this body. We heard ideas about that—online voter registration. Let's have a system where everybody's registered to vote, where everybody has access. How do we make voting easier, not harder? That should be the goal of this body. We shouldn't use policy to hide behind ways to make sure we get a better outcome in the election. Let's make policy that makes the people of Texas want to vote for us because of those policies. That's how we get the better outcome in the election. Because when we come in this body and we work together, then we go home and we get to tell the people of Texas that we accomplished things for them, not partisan divide.

The best days here, the special days here, are when we pass unanimous votes that make every Texan's life better. We did that last session when we fought for public education. We can do that again today when we vote down this bill. This bill creates new, unnecessary criminal offenses. It erects barriers to voting that are unprecedented in their scope, especially for seniors, Texans with disabilities, and people of color. What have these Texans done to earn such suspicion, other than dare to exercise their most sacred right to vote and shape the future of our democracy? Having just concluded an election cycle where a higher percentage of Texans cast their vote in the past 30 years in spite of the barriers provided by the COVID-19 pandemic, the legislature cannot in good conscience convene and respond by making it harder for Texans to vote, criminalizing democracy, and undermining faith in the integrity of our elections to discourage civic participation.

Members, success, smooth, and secure—that is your secretary of state's office. That is their report on the status of elections in Texas. Let's not buy into conspiracy theories. Let's not listen to the rhetoric out there. Let's know the facts—success, smooth, and secure. For all of these reasons, members, please

think about your vote and what it means for the people of Texas. So for those reasons, I encourage you, please vote no on **SB 7**. And let's make sure that no member's vote today makes it harder for Texans to vote tomorrow.

REPRESENTATIVE MARTINEZ FISCHER: What I would say is we've spent a lot of time on voting rights in my time here. And if you calculated the amount of time we have debated, from voter ID to redistricting to phantom problems, and if we were to just apportion a fraction of that time to Medicaid expansion, to the fact that our foster care system sits in a federal courtroom in Corpus Christi and we would rather let a federal judge fix our foster care program—because you want to fix an election system that's not broken. If we spent a fraction of the time looking for the \$50 billion that left our constituents' pockets in four days of a winter freeze, to bring that money back to our communities, we could solve that problem—but instead, we're going to focus on an election system that is not broken. We are going to lose \$100 billion in an 1115 waiver, which, by the way, is next year and which, incidentally, has a few billion in this budget, and we're going to ignore that and say we're going to deal with it mañana—because we're going to fix a problem that doesn't exist. That's what we're doing here.

So Representative Cain, you have your vote. You have your majority. But guess what? I look forward to seeing you in federal court. What I know from my days of voting rights in this chamber, you may have the vote today, but we are all equal in federal court. And history is on our side. Intent is on our side. So please do not delete any e-mails. What I want folks to know is the things you don't get to see because we sat idle for three-quarters of a day. Look at the calendar. We have about 24 days left before we go home. So the three-quarters of the day we spent yesterday is the equivalent of about two weeks in legislative business. And we sat there and did nothing while we waited, and we waited, and we waited, and we waited, and then we took up this proposal. Folks are tired, and they should be. Folks are grouchy, and they should be. Folks want to get some sleep, and they should. And we come up with a proposal and Representative Cain refused this body—not just democrats, everybody—the courtesy to explain what these changes were doing.

Now, I'm a big boy and I can read, so I understand that I have my ability to go find this language and read it and understand it, but the members of the public, our staffs, the voting rights advocates that don't get paid to be here, they have a right to know what was happening. So to simply take the microphone and say, **SB 7**, move passage—that's not our standard. That's not how we do business here. I have the votes, therefore, I don't have to explain. That's not cool. I don't care where you are on this vote. Members, you have to remember that people will treat you the way you let them. And when we start letting each other get up here on the most fundamental, the most sacred, the only thing we should really be caring about when it comes to human life, human dignity—that's our right to be heard at every election when you get to walk into that room and mark your ballot. And we can't even get the member to explain to us with a straight face what these changes do. So what it was 3 o'clock in the morning. We were here. And we're here now. And there's no reason why on third reading, Chairman Cain—and maybe when he closes—this is my invitation when he closes: Tell us what we're

doing. Tell the people in the third floor gallery what we're doing. So it's not about this gotcha. It's about make your argument. Take your vote. If you think you're making the right vote, well, then make it.

But on voting rights, there's going to be an instant replay. And fortunately, that replay isn't going to be concerned about the color of the lights. Fortunately, that replay is not going to be concerned about whether you tabled an amendment, whether you adopted an amendment, whether it was second reading, third reading, or in the back hall. That doesn't matter. What's going to matter is, did witnesses get the opportunity to be heard when **SB 7** came up? And they didn't. What's going to matter is when you start a vote and you know you're going to lose, you quit. I've taken hundreds of votes in this building. Ms. T. has probably taken thousands. I have never seen a vote stop unless the bell didn't ring and we had to start all over, and that was rare. What's going to matter is the process. What's going to matter is how we treat each other. What's going to matter is how we treated people who wanted to be heard. That's what's going to matter. So how you vote your light is of little concern to me, but think about the dignity of this process. Think about the respect we owe each other to explain exactly what we're doing whether you want to or not. I heard somebody say, and I will not out him, I heard someone say that when you bring a bill to the floor you have to defend it. And it wasn't a democrat. And I believe that. You want to carry **SB 7**, **HB 6**, you better be ready to prepare to explain it, to defend it, and when you change it, show the respect to the body that you're going to tell them what these changes are going to do.

But it should also be recognized and acknowledged that there are a number of men and women standing up here—they didn't care. They would've stayed all night to fight for the right to vote. And that began with the hardworking men and women that serve on the Elections Committee that were pressing the leadership every single step to let them know when the i's weren't dotted and the t's weren't crossed. That goes to our caucus leaders that were pressing negotiations that we spent three-quarters of a day trying to negotiate. That kept everybody else to maintain the floor and the schedule to make sure everybody was doing what they were supposed to be doing. And I must say, when we all thought this was falling apart, many of us were sitting in the back room in the corner reading the rule book, debating on who had the better point of order, and I saw somebody get out of his chair because negotiations were on life support. So I told Chairman Canales, I really appreciate the fact that while you had your other problems and other things to worry about, you were willing to get up and go revive those conversations. But make no mistake, this took this bill from very ugly to just ugly, where not a single democrat is going to vote for it and for good reason.

But what I cannot understand is that we have a bill sitting today with 76 votes, R's and D's, saying let's fix our health care program. We can't even get it to the floor. And that's the true irony. And that's what's wrong with this process. I like to say, in the old days, we took care of the people's business. And if you want to lock the door and fight like hell for 30 days I'm game. Just tell me when and where. But when the people's business is not being done and we divert ourselves to these red herrings and problems that don't exist, we are not serving

our constituents. We are not serving Texas. And frankly, we're not serving ourselves. So I hope you think about this regardless of how you vote. With the time we have left on the clock and the things we have to tackle where we are actually in the same solar system, let's fix them while we can. Let's get done with this nonsense, let's get it over into conference, and let's fix some problems. Vote no on this.

REPRESENTATIVE DAVIS: I'm going to start with a quote that I think is relevant today as it relates to where we are. And I think, members, this is to each of us. "Every time we turn our heads the other way when we see the law flouted, when we tolerate what we know to be wrong, when we close our eyes and ears to the corrupt because we are too frightened or too busy or too frightened, when we fail to speak up and speak out, we strike a blow against freedom and decency and justice."

Members, this bill ought to be about how we expand and create equal access and empower people to participate in our process, in our electoral process. We have spent a great deal of time talking about inclusion. We're one. We're Texas. We're one Texas, indivisible. And yet we're as splintered as we've ever been. The number one—the number one—issue for disenfranchisement is not having access to voting. It also perpetuates racial injustice. That's our challenge today as members of this legislature. What are we willing to do? And what is enough for us to say we cannot let Texas become like Washington or any closer to Washington? I want to just mention that we've got lots of bills that we've shared, but this is the basics. This is the foundation. This is what got us here, the electoral process. When you cut it off, when you cut access to voting off, we're harming Texas. You're not harming me. You're harming Texas and other Texans who place their confidence in you to come up with policies that will keep us as one.

So I want to just leave you with one thought. Everybody knows I get really heavy-handed, as they tell me occasionally. I'm going to be a bit heavy-handed today. And I'm going to say this because I believe in creating a more perfect world. I believe that notion. And so when I came to the legislature, it was with the thought that all lives matter. We debate all this stuff about abortions and all this other stuff, but then we don't respect our voters. We don't respect our citizens. And I just wish for once—after listening to **HB 1900** and listening to all these bills—I just wish you would recognize that the black and brown lives matter, too. Because I'm clear that I want all people to be successful. I just wish you felt that way about my community and allow them to have the same access to voting, because this is going to disenfranchise voters in my community. This will disenfranchise voters.

I would encourage you to take a deep look into yourself and ask: Did you turn your head? Did you ignore what you should be doing? Are you part of the problem or are you part of the solution? If you want to be part of the solution, let's start by saying this is not good enough for Texas. We can do better. We can be more inclusive. We can be more respectful. And start by voting no on this bill.

REPRESENTATIVE CROCKETT: I'm going to keep this brief. In short, this bill is nothing but voter suppression. Let me tell you what suppression looks like. It looks like firing back at County Judge Lina Hidalgo and former County Clerk

Chris Hollins, who braved to increase access to the ballot box for all. And instead of applauding them for assisting and increasing the participation of Texans in the process, we filed this bill. Suppression looks like black, brown, and disabled people telling you to your face that this policy will affect them in a negative way and allowing that to fall on deaf ears and passing this bill out of committee anyway. Suppression looks like reducing the participation by threatening litigation, incarceration, and empowering partisan poll watchers. And finally, when you're a freshman like me who comes into the house and believes that you have an opportunity to make a change to the extent that you somehow ended up filing more election bills than any other freshman but couldn't get one hearing, suppression looks like democrats filing hundreds of election bills yet not being allowed to be heard. I'm going to end with this. National Youth Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman said it best: "There is always light, if we're only brave enough to see it. If we're only brave enough to be it." It is time for us to be brave Texans and vote this bill down.

REPRESENTATIVE SHERMAN: All politics are local. But the more that I stay here, I believe that all politics are loco. Politics—rhyme or reason—it seems that there is no logic or reason to the politics here at the Capitol. There is a scripture that says in Proverbs 18:17 that the first account you hear is the one you believe until you hear the second account. It reminds me of Paul Harvey's words—hearing the rest of the story. Here, it seems we talk past one another. It's as though we're speaking a different language and we're not representing all the people. We say we represent our districts, but our districts represent Texas. So who are we representing if we don't represent all Texans?

In Proverbs 18:19, the Bible says that if you offend your brother, it's just as hard to win him back as it is to take over a strong city. There's a lot of offense that happens here, I notice. People get offended about some of the things that are said, but yet we act as though we don't believe the very Bibles that we have in our desks that say in Luke 17:1 that offenses will come but woe through whom they come. So in other words, offenses are all around us. All you've got to do is just say something and someone is going to be offended. But we are to be about the ministry of reconciliation. This is not about republican or democrat, independent, libertarian. This is about control freaks. We've gotten to the point that we want our way no matter what. But yet God, who is all powerful and all knowing, allows us to make choices to work together not for party but for his people. And so often it's because we don't know each other. We are not talking to each other.

All politics are local. When I was mayor, I remember we had this thing where we had juniors in our high school that would be mayor for a day. And I looked over there and I didn't see Mayor Cook but Mayor Paddie. And one year, the mayor for a day was a young lady by the name Vicky Nguyen. And 25 years prior to that, I had worked for a company called Sprint, and I was in national accounts. And I was a self-appointed inventor, and I would develop different products to augment our revenue and decrease our expenses. And our president and CEO at the time, Bill Esrey, would provide things for me so I could provide for my family, and I was very appreciative. Vicky Nguyen came to my office that

morning, early, to be mayor for a day and to shadow me. And it had been 25 years since I had been at Sprint. While I was at Sprint, there was a custodial company that would teach me to speak their language. It was about a month and then their contract was canceled for a Hispanic company, and my tongue is too lazy to speak Spanish. So I see Vicky Nguyen coming down the stairs, and I think to myself, I'm going to try. I'm going to see if I can recall, sister T, what I learned. And I said, "Annyeong-haseyo, sugohaesseo, chingu, kamsahamnida." And she looked at me bright-eyed and said, "Mr. Mayor, you speak excellent Korean." For all that time, I thought I was speaking Mandarin.

We don't spend time talking about the issues to know the language and to feel where we're coming from. We make these prejudicial decisions so rapidly without even considering changing, because the party says I have to vote this way. With all due respect, Mr. Cain, I find him to be a great man. Mr. Cain, I find you to be a very honorable man. And Mr. Cain, I could make that assessment not by knowing you, as I do, but by knowing your family, your wife, Bergundi, and your five sons, and seeing how orderly and well-behaved they are as young men. I've said—you don't have to pay for this one—I have said that the most difficult parenting is when you have multiple same-sex children. Because Michelle and I, we have five kids, but we've got boy, girl, boy, girl, boy, and the girls bring civilization to the household. So my hat's off to you. And when you stood here and laid out your bill, you answered each of those questions patiently as I watched you in the beginning. And you acknowledged when Chairman Anchia said to you about the purity at the ballot box—you acknowledged that you didn't know. I believe you.

My mother, who was born in 1937, told me about her life in Texas. And though women could vote when Congress ratified the vote in 1920 and the Nineteenth Amendment gave the right for women to vote, my mother, who is a woman, could not vote. My mother could not vote until she was about 40 years old because even though she was a woman, she was a black woman in Texas. And if she voted, it could have cost her her life and her family's life. That's how precious the vote is. And I know you didn't know. I know you didn't know.

You know, sometimes as we're growing up—as I'm coming to a close, Mr. Speaker and members—as you're growing up, you began to change. You don't know, but everyone tells you you look like your father. And one day as you're getting ready for just another day, as you are getting ready for another day, as you have finished shaving, you stare into the mirror only to discover and realize that the person you're looking at in the mirror resembles your father. Maybe you're not as overwhelming in stature but the similarities are undeniable. You may not be as commanding, boisterous, or dominating. You're more polished than your father. You're well-educated. You're soft and you're gentle and genuine. Our parents knew Jim Crow. And just like older people see our parents in us before we see it, often, my parents look at the children of the old Jim Crow and they see the resemblance in his children. Though they may not be Jim Crow because they would never be as crude as to enact some of the laws that they did. They just moved to communities where there are fewer of us, and that's why our ISDs are more segregated than they were before.

If I can just say, one of the things that I love about being an adult is that we can be candid with one another. We can be transparent. We can just talk. I've often served as the first African American in various positions, whether it's leadership in city management or mayor. And being the first is often different because some people are not comfortable with that. I used to meet with all the young white professionals in my city of DeSoto. Every Wednesday morning at 8:30, I would hold a meeting with them because I noticed that there were many white young professionals. And I would meet with them to ask them about what they liked about the city of DeSoto. I would give them assignments. They began to call me Professor Mayor. One of the assignments was you pick the city you would like to live in if you didn't live in DeSoto. Some of them said McKinney. Some of them said The Woodlands, Representative Toth. Some of them said McKinney. They said—well, you get the point. I asked them, if DeSoto had the best-ranked school district academically in the nation, not in Texas but in the nation, would you send your kids to DeSoto ISD? Now, in order to be a part of this group, you had to promise to be candid, and I promised that I would never be judgmental. And I asked them would they send their kids to the school. And they said no. Not if it was the top-ranked academic school in Texas but in the nation—they said no. I asked why. They said because we would be outnumbered.

As I come to a close here, we are at a tipping point as a nation. And I'm going to have to wrap up. I really had this close that I was going to make, but thank you all very much for listening. God bless you. Whether you're republican or democrat, we're all one.

REPRESENTATIVE J. GONZÁLEZ: I'll keep his short, but I do want to share as a member who served on the Elections Committee. This is one of the most challenging sessions for me and I think for many of us for many, many reasons. One thing that I did learn is that we have to do better and we have a lot of work to do. In serving on this committee is seeing people being silenced, being disrespected—both my colleague Michelle Beckley and I—but we fought every single day. And I showed up to committee to hear testimony from the people because that is what we are sent here to do. I take pride in serving my district just like everyone else here does, and we are sent here to serve our people, to pass policy based on good data, good policy—you know, data-driven policy. That's what we're sent here to do—to make the lives better for the people of Texas, not to hurt them.

And when I first thought about when I ran for office, I thought that that's what we were sent here to do—that we actually have conversations, that we can meet in the middle. Because there are many things that we can meet in the middle on and we can pass good policy that is going to serve our constituents. And it's really disappointing that we're sent here every other year for 140 days, yet we sit here and we debate these issues that Texans don't really want. And when you hear an overwhelming majority of people testify and say we don't want this—we don't want this—yet we still ram it through anyway because we don't have the numbers. Members, that's not what our democracy is supposed to look like. That's not what we're sent here to do. We're sent here to listen to the people, to pass law that is going make their lives better. Yet we want to play politics because

we don't have the numbers, and we have these laws that get forced down our throats and forced down to our constituents who don't want these policies in Texas.

And you heard yesterday from the author of this bill guessing on—"Yes, I guess this does that." In my opinion, you should not bring a bill to the floor if you don't understand it yourself, if you don't understand the effect of what this bill would have on the people of Texas. Because not even the AG could even give an explanation of that, and these the people that are going to be enforcing this bill, this law. I mean, you heard the author of the bill also say, "You can't find what you don't look for." And members, that to me sounds like a witch hunt. And I'll just reiterate what I said yesterday, that when this bill passes, today is a dark day in Texas. So I encourage you to vote no and do right by Texas.

REPRESENTATIVE BOWERS: Members I don't usually say much, but when I say something, I mean it. I didn't plan to say anything and speak against this bill, but I feel that I have to because I came here, just like I hope most of you did, to make a difference. One thing that I write to my constituents is that we're moving Texas forward. Let's move Texas forward together. And right now and in this 87th Legislative Session, it feels very retroactive to me. It seems that in almost 140 days, day in and day out, we have stripped everything away. And we keep doing it.

We're not moving Texas forward. The one right that we have is our voting right—the right to be heard, the right to believe in democracy. As I stood here and listened to our colleagues, I thought about my father, who is no longer here, who was an immigrant who got here as fast as he could, who said and thought that Texas was God's country. But I don't see us making a better way for our children and those coming behind us. I hope that you all want to go home after this session is over and tell all of your constituents what a great job you did—that you fought for their rights, that you fought for them to have a better way of life and better quality of life. And I don't know that we'll all be able to say that. When you vote no, because that is the way I'm encouraging you to vote, ask yourselves—am I moving Texas forward? Am I making things better for the people that I serve, with every vote but especially with this one?

When this bill was heard in the Elections Committee, it was an explosive day in the house, right? We were hearing all sorts of bills. The George Floyd Act, we heard that, defund the police. And I'm trying to stay on this bill and what we're talking about, but people with all different ways of thought came here to be heard. But the most explosive was probably the Elections Committee. I'm proud to say in our committee, we let people be heard, but I don't know if the Elections Committee can say that. So when you cast your vote, vote no. And know that when you do, you are standing up for people who are coming behind you, people that we want to move to the State of Texas because they are moving somewhere for a better way of life.

CAIN: There were a few amendments put on in second reading. I guess earlier this morning, now that I think about it. I almost said yesterday. Much of those changes made to this bill were made in response to things we learned in and out of committee. In fact, one of those perfecting amendments from second reading

was made at the advice of the Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities. Another one of those perfecting amendments was based on recommendations from the NAACP of Texas chapter. This bill took a lot of work. We heard ideas from many members and constituents. This bill protects every single Texas voter. It does not punish people for making honest mistakes. To that end, actually, some of the amendments that went on yesterday were designed to clarify and ensure that people would not be prosecuted for honest mistakes.

This bill requires the Election Code to be applied uniformly and consistently statewide. It requires the provisions of this Election Code to be strictly construed and prohibits the unauthorized altering or waiving or suspension of an election procedure practiced by any public official. It ensures that voter rolls are accurate by requiring the abstracts of deceased voters to be sent to the appropriate authority within seven days of being created. It increases transparency by adding spoiled ballots from a voting system that uses paper ballot backups to the list of spoiled ballots that must be logged. It also increases transparency by listing in one place the persons who may be present at a polling place and an early voting ballot board or a central counting station.

In relation to poll watchers, something that gets talked about a lot, this bill and the amendments added on second reading clarify the existing duties and purpose of poll watchers and ensures that poll watchers are able to properly observe the activity for which they were appointed. So this bill seeks to strike a balance between poll watchers and election workers. See, watchers are not there technically to watch the voters. That's the job of the election judge. So the watcher is there to watch the process. They're there to watch the people running the election. And because the election judge is part of that process, it makes little sense for the judge to be able to eject the watcher for any cause—or without cause, rather. Therefore, it further instills trust in the electoral system by ensuring that poll watchers cannot disrupt the delivery of ballots, be removed without cause, or prevented from properly performing their duties. This bill does not allow, by the way, poll watchers to harass voters nor does it prevent poll watchers from being removed for committing crimes or violating the Election Code.

In relation to assisting voters, this bill protects voters who are unable to write or see due to physical disability or those who are unable to read the language in which the ballot is written. It protects them from being taken advantage of by updating the oath—an existing oath of assistance—to clarify that the assistant did not improperly persuade the voter. The bill also makes it an offense for a person to commit perjury by making a false statement on that oath. The bill also increases transparency and protections of voters eligible to receive assistance at a polling place by requiring persons other than the election officers who assist a voter to complete a form with the assistant's name, address, and relationship. It actually—the older version required you to say why you were assisting them and how you were assisting them, but that's something we removed after talking to some disability groups.

This bill protects those who choose to vote by mail by adding to the form already required to be completed by a person assisting them in preparing their ballot to list their relationship to the voter and whether the person was given any

compensation or other benefit in exchange for providing assistance. Additionally, this bill prohibits a person from requesting or receiving a monetary benefit or political favor in exchange for assisting a voter in preparing their ballot by mail. Similarly, the bill protects voters who choose to vote by mail by prohibiting a person from paying or offering to pay another to assist a voter to prepare their ballot. The bill further protects voters who vote by mail by adding to the content already required to be placed on the carrier envelope by requiring the relationship of the assistant to the voter be added. The bill prohibits voting in more than one state. It protects the integrity of the ballot box by prohibiting the alteration of a ballot to no longer reflect the voter's intent or making them count invalid ballots if the person knew they were valid or invalid. Vote trafficking is buying or selling votes for profit. Financial involvement can tend to make things a little corruptible, and this bill strengthens prohibitions against vote trafficking. This bill prohibits the use of tax dollars by local governments from being used to solicit applications of vote-by-mail or distribute applications for vote-by-mail, early voting ballot materials, or any early voting ballot by mail to persons who did not request them. It doesn't prevent your campaigns from sending them out. The bill also prohibits public officials from pre-filling any portion of that application before sending it to that voter.

In relation to judicial review, this bill ensures that legal challenges are expeditiously handled by requiring courts to give priority to and expedite consideration of election cases alleging fraud. And actually, I believe due to some amendments yesterday, it allowed that for any kind of election thing so that people can get their case in court because come Election Day, things are over. And I believe that if there are issues with an election, people should be able to get it swiftly resolved. This bill also ensures that cases alleging violation of the Election Code in a trial court are free from any potential judicial bias by requiring that cases be randomly assigned to a court. And it prohibits any person, including a public official, from attempting to improperly influence a court or the judge.

This bill, it may have my name on it, it may have some members of this committee and members of this body, it may have Senator Hughes' name on it, but it doesn't belong to me and it doesn't belong to him. This bill belongs to Texans. It's written for all Texans.

[**SB 7** was passed by Record No. 848.]